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Toms

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(54) **SYSTEM AND METHOD OF SIMULATING WITH RESPECT TO SPHEROID REFERENCE MODELS USING LOCAL SURFACE COORDINATES**

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(51) **Int. Cl.**
G06F 7/60 (2006.01)
G06F 17/10 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.** **703/2; 345/427**

(58) **Field of Classification Search** **703/2**
See application file for complete search history.

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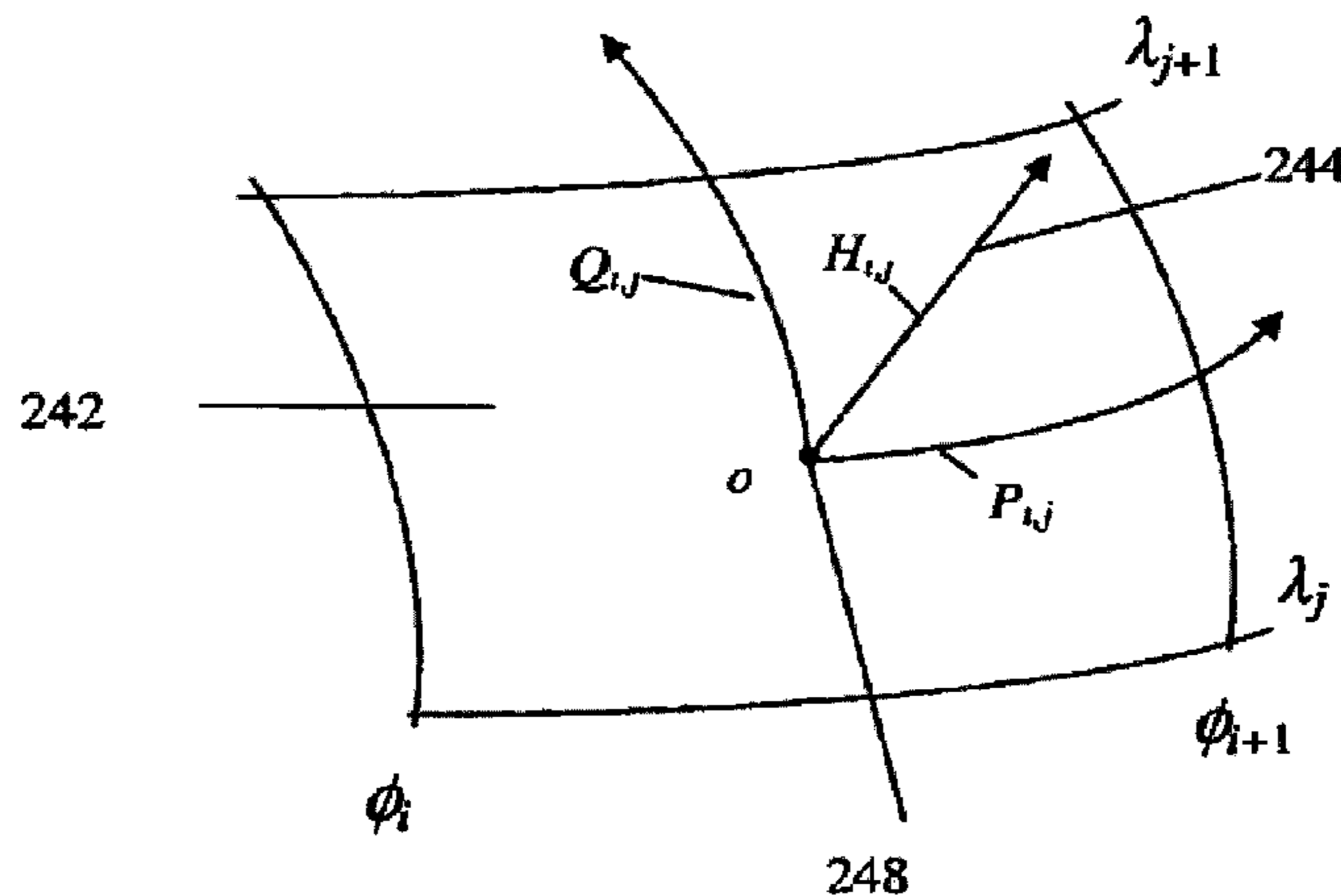
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

Described are a method and system for describing a position of an entity in a three-dimensional coordinate system with respect to the reference model. The reference model is of a three-dimensional curved surface defined in the three-dimensional coordinate system. The three-dimensional curved surface is divided into a set of cells. Each cell is a subset of the three-dimensional curved surface and has a curved surface. A three-dimensional curvilinear coordinate system is defined for each cell in the set of cells. The three-dimensional curvilinear coordinate system for each cell has a curvilinear axis that extends along the curved surface of that cell.

20 Claims, 6 Drawing Sheets



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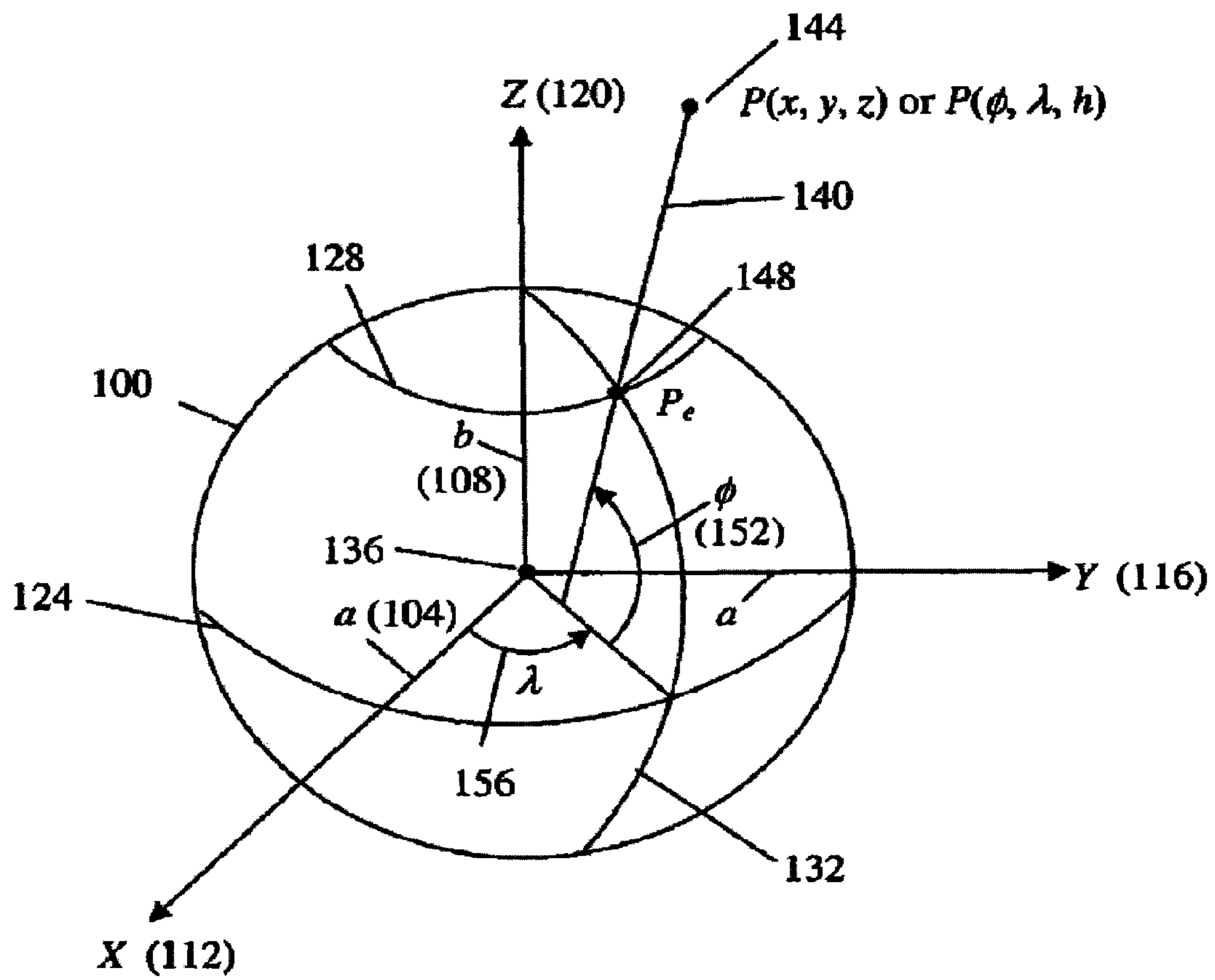


FIG. 1

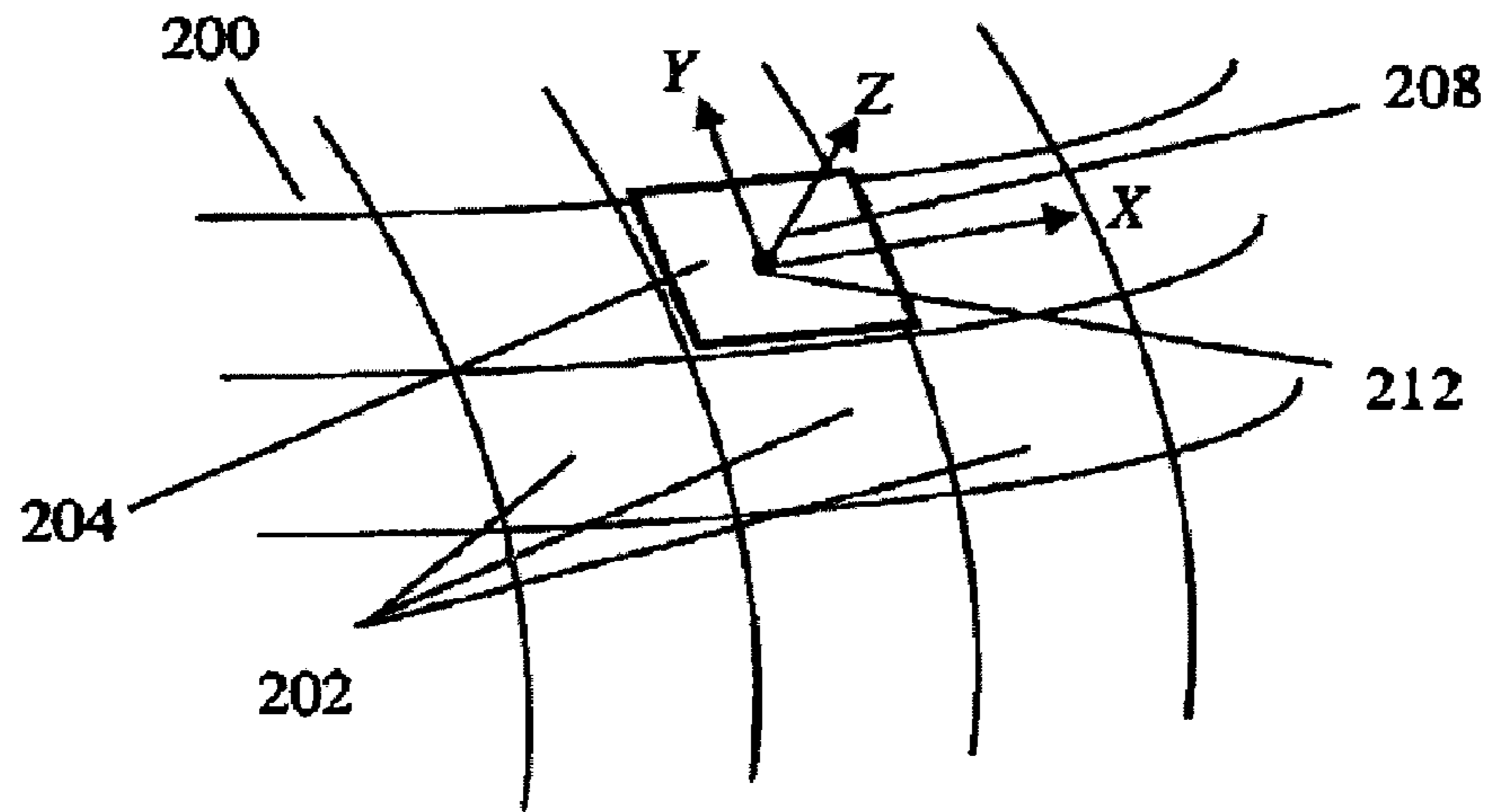


FIG. 2
(GCS)
Prior Art

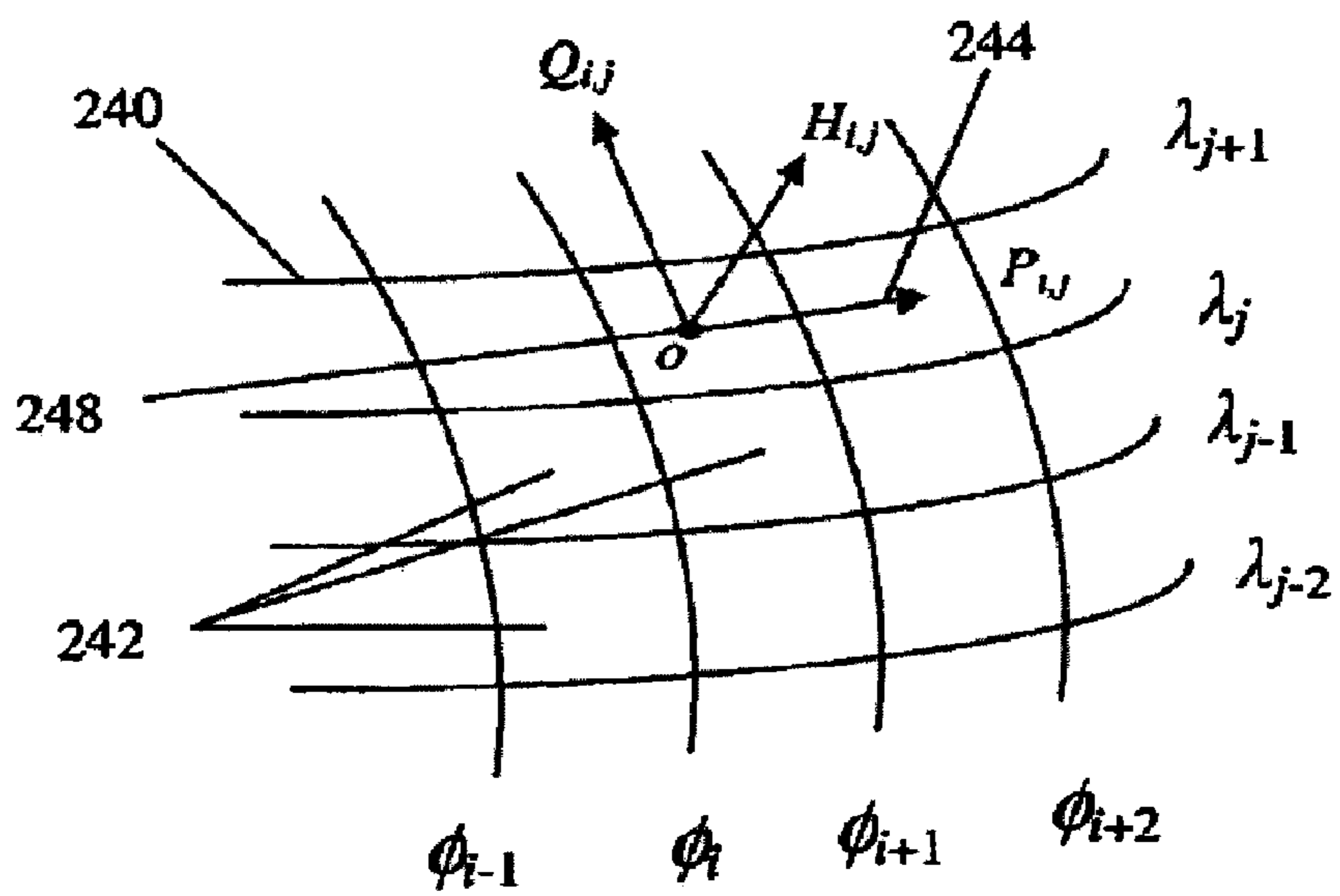


FIG. 3A
(LSC)

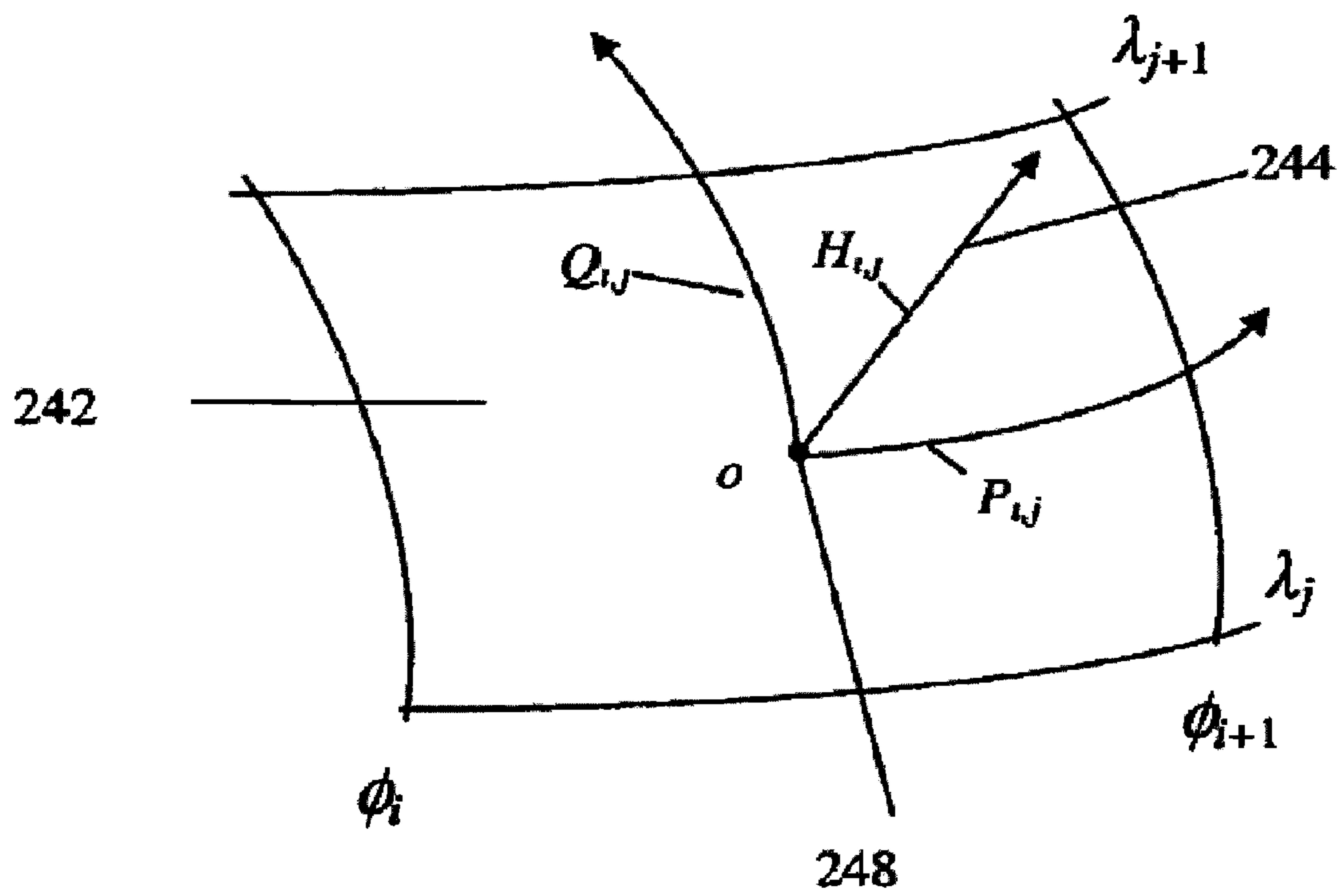


FIG. 3B

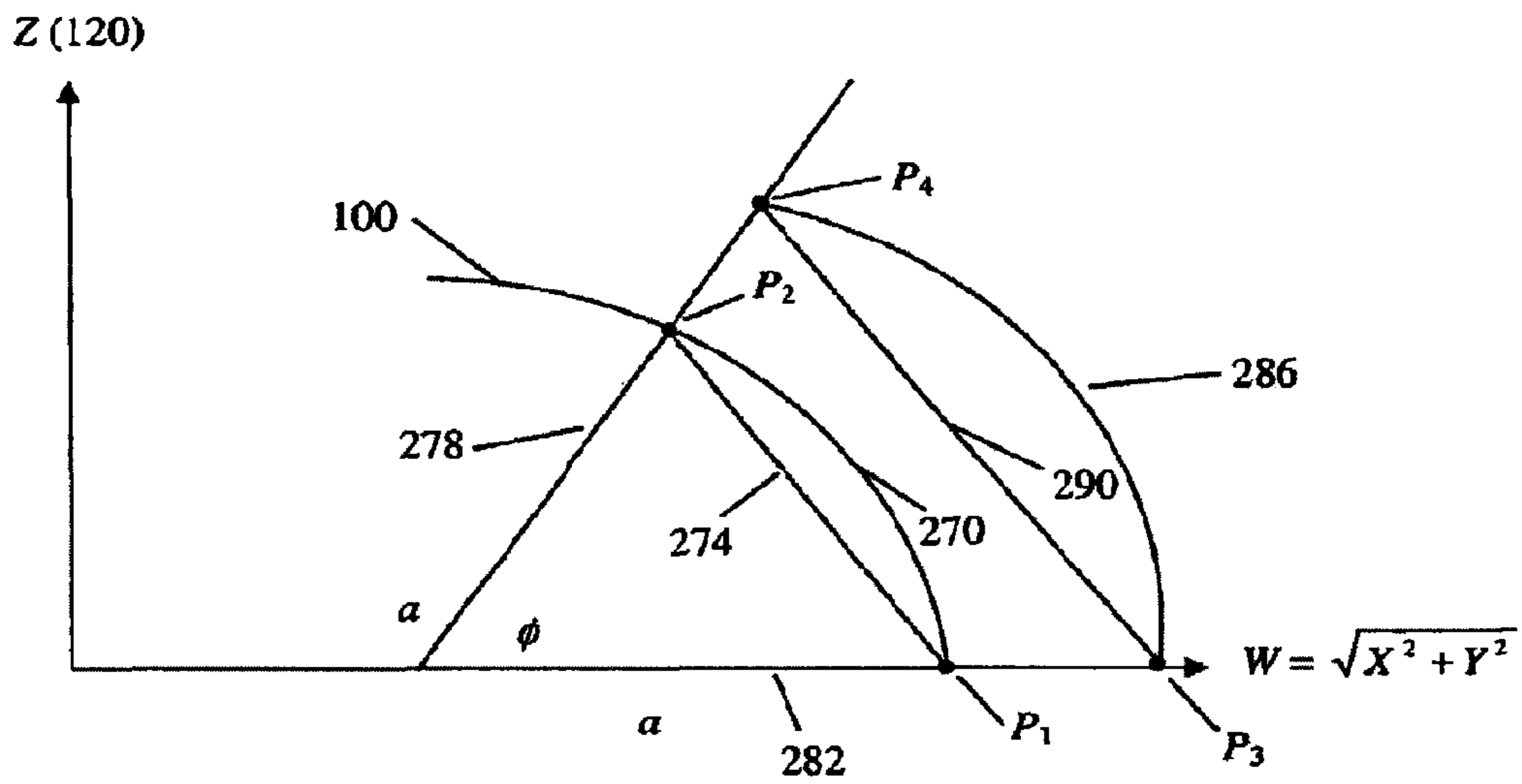


FIG. 4

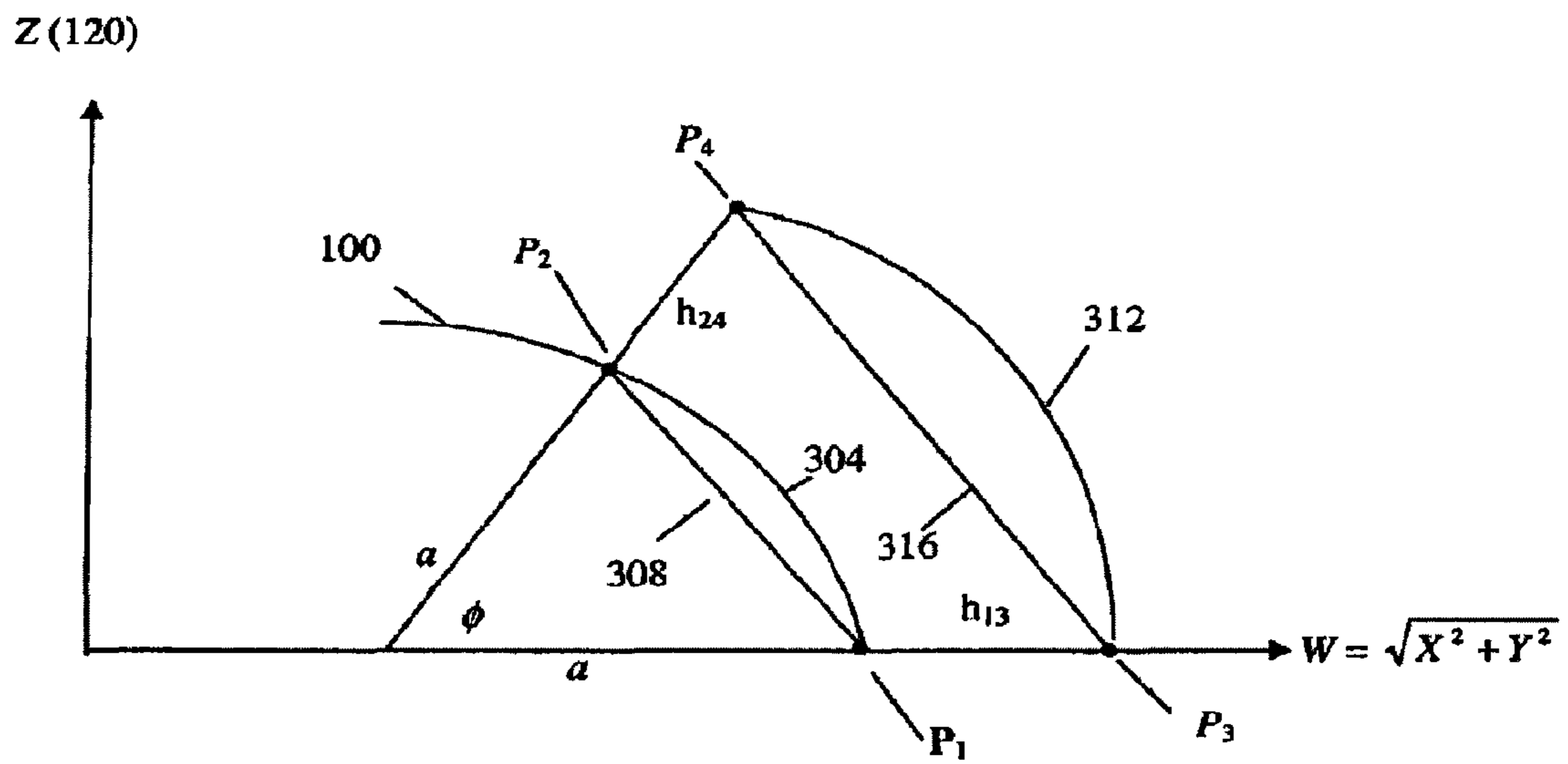


FIG. 5

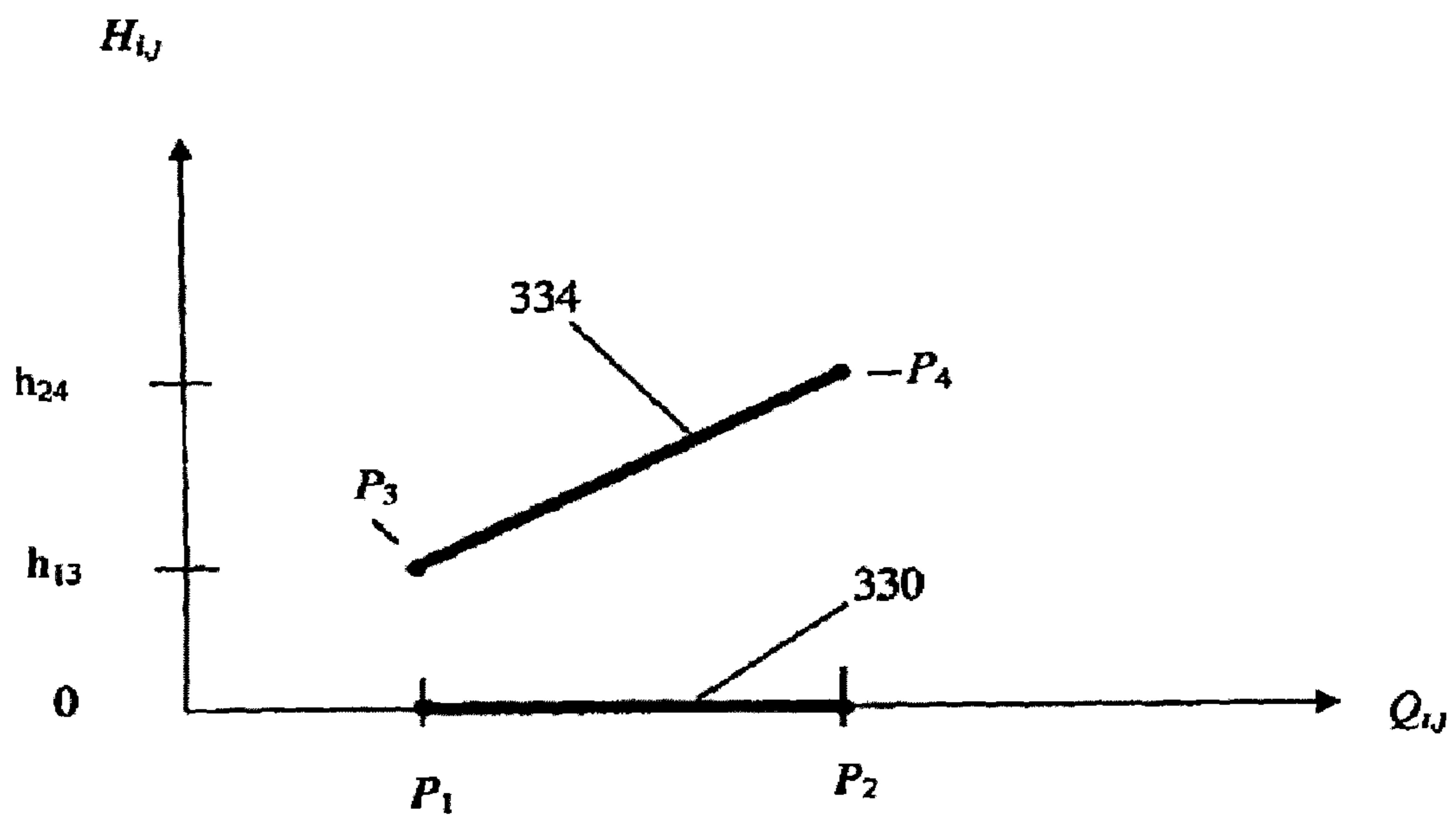


FIG. 6

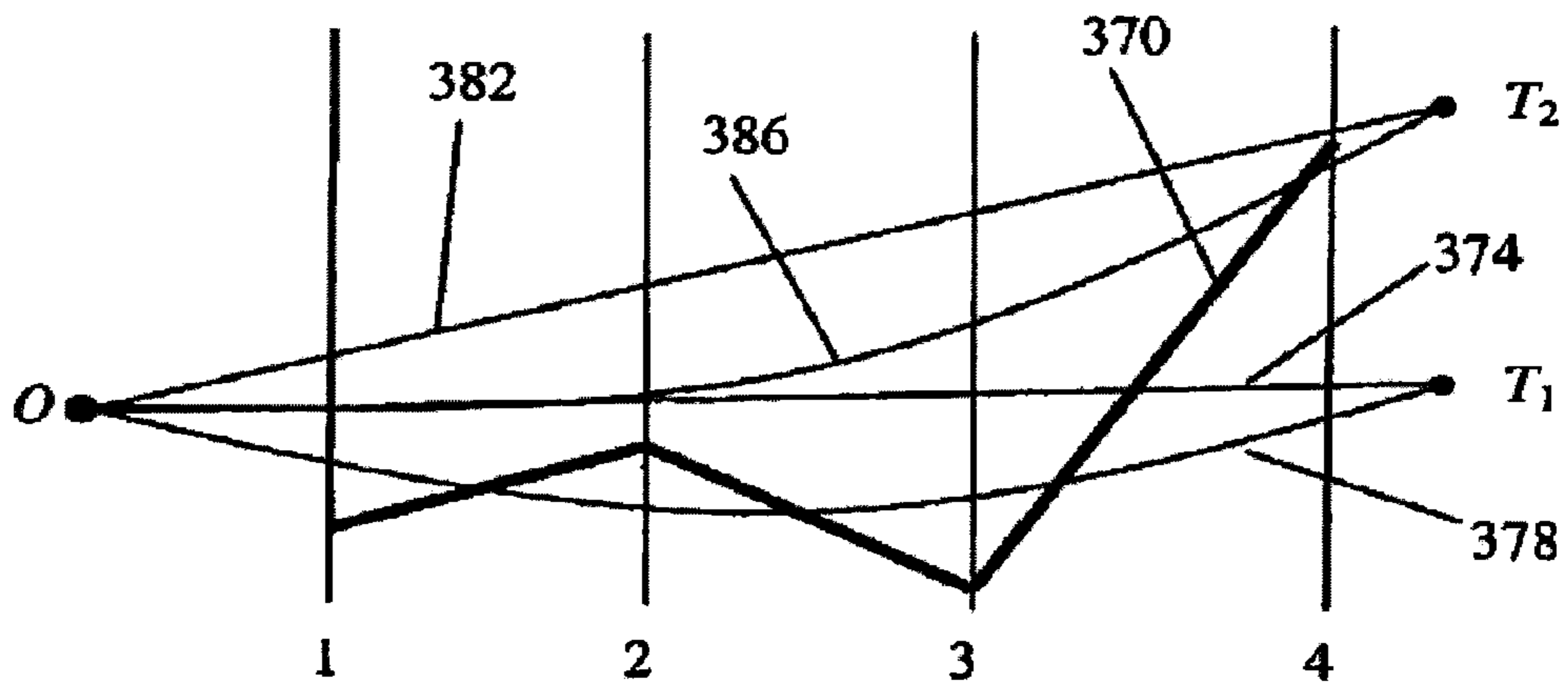


FIG. 7

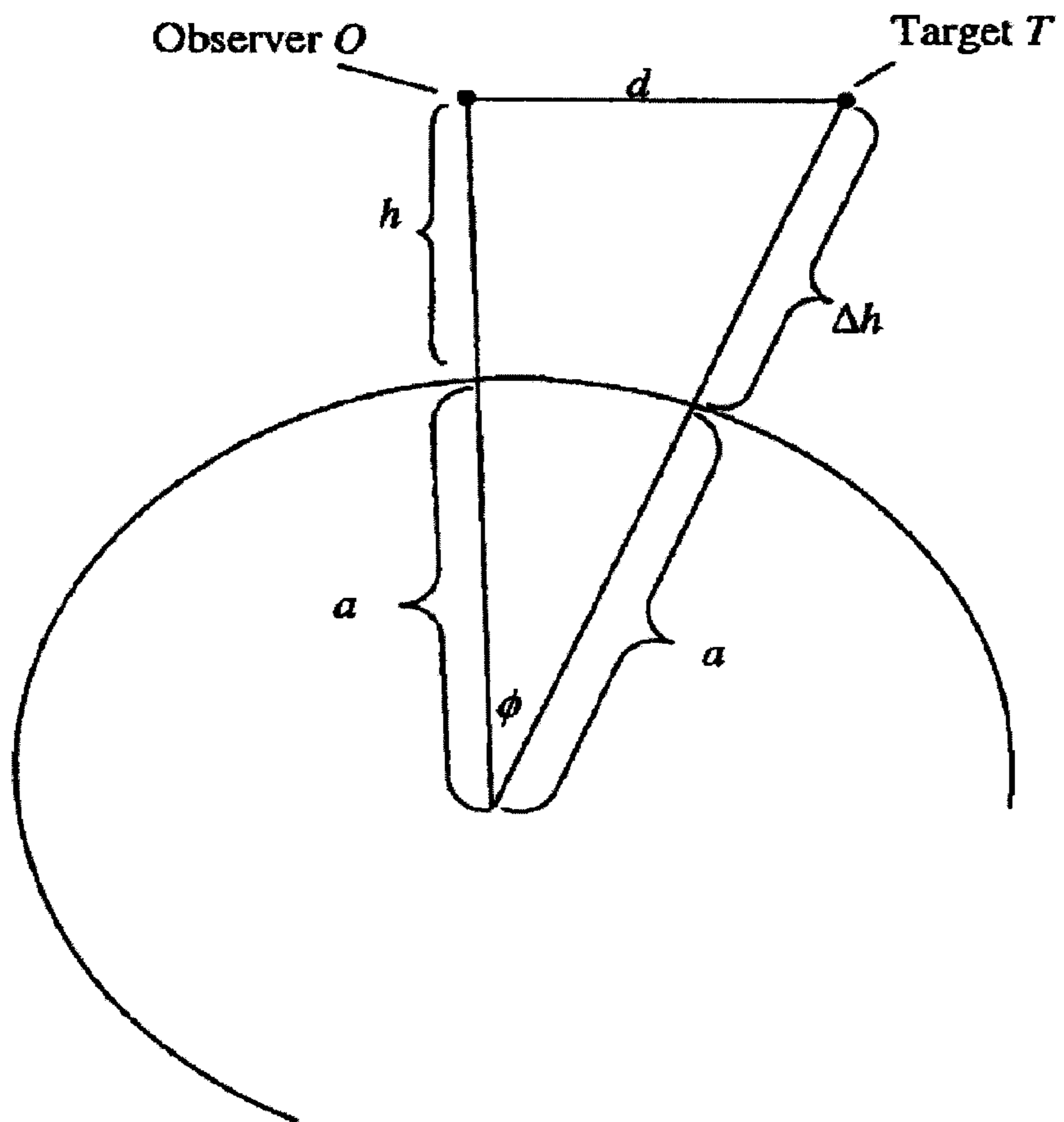


FIG. 8

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**SYSTEM AND METHOD OF SIMULATING
WITH RESPECT TO SPHEROID REFERENCE
MODELS USING LOCAL SURFACE
COORDINATES**

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED PATENT
APPLICATIONS

This application is a Continuation of U.S. application Ser. No. 10/213,157, filed Aug. 6, 2002, now U.S. Pat. No. 7,428, 476, incorporated herein by reference in its entirety, which claims priority from Provisional Application U.S. Application No. 60/311,412, filed Aug. 10, 2001, incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The invention relates generally to embedded systems and modeling and simulation systems. More particularly, the invention relates to a spatial framework for use by embedded systems and modeling and simulation systems.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The technical community has long recognized the benefits of modeling and simulation as a major component of simulation systems, simulator systems, and embedded systems. Certain real-world activities, such as flight training, combat scenarios, missile operations, and fire fighting, are too expensive or too dangerous to test, practice, or use to support analytic studies. Modeling and simulation enables simulated testing, analysis, and personnel training without expending costly resources or exposing personnel to the dangerous situations.

Modeling provides a physical, mathematical, or logical representation of a system, entity, phenomenon, or process. An example of a model is an earth reference model (ERM), which provides a representation of certain aspects of the Earth, such as its shape, mass, and gravity. Simulation is a process of exercising a model over time. Categories of simulation include live simulation, virtual simulation, and constructive simulation. For live simulation, personnel use real-world equipment, such as airplanes, ships, missiles, and vehicles, which perform simulated operations, such as mock combat. For virtual simulation, personnel operate simulators instead of the actual real-world equipment. Constructive simulation involves computerized models of personnel and equipment that may have human interactors or players providing higher level tactics. The actions performed by the personnel and equipment modeled occur entirely within a computer program.

The usefulness of these types of simulations for testing, analyzing, or training depends upon how closely each simulation resembles the real world. The development of computational capabilities (e.g., more memory, faster processors and processing techniques) has improved the realism of some simulations. Yet despite this improvement, computational performance still limits the level of detail, and, thus, the degree of realism, attainable in simulation systems.

The coordinate framework used by a simulation system, for example, to simulate motion dynamics and geometric relations, is a principal factor in computational complexity. Computational complexity means that complex formulations are typically slower to compute than other formulations. Generally, the number of transcendental functions involved in a formulation provides a measure of the computational complexity of that formulation. Examples of transcendental func-

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tions include trigonometric functions, the inverse trigonometric functions and other functions such as powers, exponential functions, and logarithms.

Today, simulation systems use a variety of coordinate systems and associated earth reference models. Designers of these systems often assume that the earth is flat (locally) and use localized rectangular coordinates for both dynamic and static spatial referencing. The rectangular coordinates permit simplified mathematical formulation with the promise of acceptable computer runtimes. When employing rectangular coordinates, however, a designer of a typical, computationally intensive application involving Earth geometry makes major modeling compromises, such as gross simplifications to the actual shape of the Earth and to the local environment. These gross simplifications lead to a loss of fidelity that can endanger lives and require expensive subsequent reparations.

The Global Coordinate System (GCS) is an example of one such system that was designed to permit various simplifications to be made to increase processing speed, but such simplifications still compromise the fidelity of the underlying mathematical models. In GCS, the surface of the Earth Reference Model is divided (or tessellated) into nominally 1 degree latitude by 1 degree longitude cells (or tiles). A rectangular canonical local tangent plane (CLTP) coordinate system is defined at the center of each cell. One problem with GCS is that the latitude/longitude cells on the surface do not map to rectangles on each coordinate plane of the CLTP. Another problem is that the curved tessellation cell boundaries do not map to straight lines corresponding to rectangular cells. This introduces gaps or slivers in the surface representation. When the terrain surface is modeled in GCS, gaps may occur into which modeled entities such as vehicles can "disappear." Such terrain skin representations can be repaired but at great expense and loss of fidelity.

In dynamic modeling within the GCS spatial framework, it is often assumed that the acceleration of gravity is normal (i.e., perpendicular) to the local tangent plane centered at the cell center. Because of this assumption, the acceleration of gravity is not normal to the Earth reference model for most points within the cell. This results in inaccurate dynamic formulations. Another simplification made when using GCS is that the vertical distance above each plane is deemed to be the same as geodetic height (height above an oblate spheroid). This simplification produces discontinuities across cell boundaries and modifies real world geometric relationships.

Therefore, there remains a need for a coordinate framework that reduces computational complexity yet avoids the aforementioned problems.

SUMMARY

In one aspect, the invention features a system comprising a reference model of three-dimensional curved surface defined in a three-dimensional coordinate system. The three-dimensional curved surface is divided into a set of cells. Each cell is a subset of the three-dimensional curved surface and itself has a curved surface. The system also includes a three-dimensional curvilinear coordinate system for each cell in the set of cells for describing a position of an entity in the three-dimensional coordinate system with respect to the reference model. The three-dimensional curvilinear coordinate system for each cell has a first curvilinear axis that extends along the curved surface of that cell.

In another aspect, the invention features a curvilinear coordinate system for determining a position of an entity in a three-dimensional coordinate system with respect to a reference model of a three-dimensional curved surface. The three-

dimensional curved surface is divided into a set of cells. Each cell is a subset of the three-dimensional curved surface and has a curved surface. The coordinate system includes an origin located on the curved surface of one of the cells in the set of cells, a first curvilinear axis extending along on the curved surface of the one cell through the origin, a second curvilinear axis orthogonal to the first curvilinear axis and extending along on the curved surface of the one cell through the origin, and a rectilinear axis orthogonal to the first and second curvilinear axes and extending through the origin normal to the curved surface of the one cell.

In another aspect, the invention features a method for describing a position of an entity in a three-dimensional coordinate system with respect to a reference model of a spheroid having a three-dimensional curved surface. A set of cells on the three-dimensional curved surface of the reference model is defined. Each cell is a subset of the three-dimensional curved surface and has a curved surface. Also, for each cell in the set of cells, a three-dimensional curvilinear coordinate system is defined. The three-dimensional curvilinear coordinate system has a first curvilinear axis extending along on the curved surface of that cell.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The above and further advantages of this invention may be better understood by referring to the following description in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, in which like numerals indicate like structural elements and features in various figures. The drawings are not necessarily to scale, emphasis instead being placed upon illustrating the principles of the invention.

FIG. 1 is a diagram of an embodiment of a reference spheroid having a three-dimensional curved surface and of examples of three-dimensional coordinate systems associated with the reference spheroid.

FIG. 2 is a diagram of an embodiment of a tessellation of the three-dimensional curved surface and of a local tangent plane defined in a cell as represented in a prior art coordinate system.

FIG. 3A is a diagram of an embodiment of a division of the three-dimensional curved surface according to the principles of the present invention.

FIG. 3B is a diagram of an embodiment of a cell resulting from the division of the three-dimensional curved surface and of an orthogonal curvilinear local coordinate system defined for that cell according to the principles of the invention.

FIG. 4 is a two-dimensional representation of an embodiment of a constant angular velocity path determined in accordance with the principles of the invention.

FIG. 5 is a two-dimensional representation of an embodiment of terrain skin model performed in accordance with the principles of the invention.

FIG. 6 is a graph showing an embodiment of a linear relationship between height h and q for terrain skin modeling in accordance with the principles of the invention.

FIG. 7 is a two-dimensional graphical representation of a line-of-sight computation performed in accordance with the principles of the invention.

FIG. 8 is a two-dimensional graphical representation of a height correction computation used in performing line-of-sight computations.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Many application domains, for example, simulations, simulators, embedded systems, operational planning and

assessment tools, real-time mission planning, weather prediction, fire fighting, and emergency response, need to point below, on, or above the surface of the Earth. Applications in these domains create and control elements, referred to as entities. Examples of entities in a combat simulation are aircraft, tanks, missiles, and personnel. Commonly, simulation applications control more than one entity. These applications need a well-defined coordinate system. To this end, the present invention features a curvilinear orthogonal local surface coordinate system that provides a description of the location of entities in a three-dimensional coordinate system with respect to a reference model.

FIG. 1 shows an embodiment of a reference spheroid **100** used to provide a representative expression of the shape of a planetary body such as the Earth. Generally, the spheroid **100** is a closed, sphere-like surface. Defined mathematically, the spheroid **100** has a shape according to the following equation:

$$\frac{x^2}{a^2} + \frac{y^2}{a^2} + \frac{z^2}{b^2} = 1 \quad (\text{Eq. 1})$$

where a is a semi-major axis **104** and b is a semi-minor axis **108** of the spheroid **100**, and x , y and z are coordinates along the X , Y , and Z axes **112**, **116**, **120** (described further below), respectively.

In one embodiment, the spheroid **100** is an oblate spheroid. That is, the semi-minor axis b **108** of the spheroid **100** is shorter than the semi-major axis a **104**. The oblate spheroid has parallels of latitude (e.g., latitudes **124** and **128**) and parallels of longitude (e.g., longitude **132**). Latitude is the angle ϕ that is opposite to and extends to the equatorial plane of the spheroid **100** by a perpendicular through the surface of the spheroid **100** from a point. For geodetic latitude, the perpendicular **140** to the surface does not go through the center **136** of the spheroid **100**. For geocentric latitude, the perpendicular **140** passes through the center **136** of the spheroid **100**. Longitude (geodetic and geocentric) is the angle λ , in radians, measured about the minor axis **108** of the spheroid **100** from a prime meridian to the meridian through a point.

In another embodiment, the semi-minor axis b **108** of the spheroid **100** is shorter than or equal to the semi-major axis a **104**, which includes the case where the spheroid **100** is a sphere (i.e., $a=b$). In yet another embodiment, the semi-minor axis b **108** of the spheroid **100** is longer than the semi-major axis a **104** (here, for this embodiment, setting aside the conventional definitions of semi-major and semi-minor). In this instance, the spheroid **100** is a prolate spheroid. By conventional use, the definitions above of latitude and longitude apply to an oblate spheroid. Similar angular measures can be defined for a sphere and for a prolate spheroid.

The spheroid **100** is part of a reference model that may specify parameters that describe the geophysical environment of the planetary body represented by the spheroid **100**. Examples of specified parameters include the shape, mass, angular velocity and detailed gravity model of the planetary body. An example of a system that provides an oblate spheroid reference model (i.e., an Earth reference model or ERM) is the WGS84 (World Geodetic System 84) ellipsoid. Although Earth reference models are frequently referred to throughout the description, it is to be noted that the principles of the invention are not limited to the Earth, but apply also to other planetary bodies.

At least one three-dimensional coordinate system is associated with the reference model. Each coordinate system serves to map a point to a location on, above, or below the

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surface of the spheroid **100**. For example, two natural three-dimensional coordinate systems are a geocentric coordinate system (x, y, z) and a geodetic coordinate system (ϕ , λ , h).

The geocentric coordinate system has three orthogonal rectilinear axes: the X axis **112**, the Y axis **116**, and the Z axis **120**. The origin **136** of the geocentric coordinate system is the center of the spheroid **100**. The positive X axis **112** extends from the origin **136** through the prime meridian, the positive Y axis **116** extends through the ninety degree east longitude at the equator, and the positive Z axis **120** extends through the north pole of the spheroid **100**.

The geodetic coordinate system has geodetic latitude **152**, ϕ , measured from the equatorial plane, a geodetic longitude **156**, λ measured from the prime meridian, and a geodetic height, h, measured from the surface of the oblate spheroid **100**.

The description of the location of an entity in a three-dimensional coordinate system with respect to the reference model depends upon the type of coordinate system used. For example, consider point **144**. A line **140** drawn normal from point **144** to the surface of the spheroid **100** intersects the surface at point **148** (P_e). In the geocentric coordinate system, the coordinates of the point **144** are of the form P(x, y, z). In the geodetic coordinate system, the coordinates of the point **144** are of the form P(ϕ , λ , h).

FIG. **2** illustrates a prior art coordinate system called the global coordinate system (GCS). GCS uses the surface of the WGS84 ellipsoid as the Earth reference model. A regular surface grid **200** of cells or tiles **202** covers the surface of the ellipsoid. The cells are nominally defined by a regular $1^\circ \times 1^\circ$ latitude-longitude grid. Each latitude-longitude cell has a curved surface according to the curved surface of the ellipsoid and has dimensions of 1 degree latitude by 1 degree longitude. More than 47,000 cells cover the ellipsoid.

At the center **212** of each cell **202**, a local tangent plane **204** is formed and a CLTP coordinate system **208** is defined. The coordinate system **208** includes a two-dimensional rectangular coordinate system with axes X and Y in the tangent plane **204**. The origin is at the cell center **212** and the Y axis is aligned with the direction of true north along a meridian. The Z axis extends normal to the X-Y tangent plane **204** at the origin to form the three-dimensional canonical local tangent plane (CLTP) coordinate system. More than 47,000 such CLTP coordinate systems exist in GCS, each of which can serve as a basis for a simulation model.

The local tangent plane **204** touches the surface of the cell **202** at the center **212** and, due to the curvature of the cell surface, is separate from and above the surface of the cell **202** at the projected cell boundaries. In FIG. **2**, the separation of the local tangent plane **204** from the cell surface at the cell boundaries is exaggerated to illustrate that the local tangent plane **204** does not touch all points on the cell surface.

In theory, each of these CLTP coordinate systems have rectilinear X, Y, and Z axes that extend to infinity. In practice, operations are simulated that are nominally constrained to the underlying latitude-longitude grid **200**. When an entity moves from one cell to another the CLTP coordinate system is changed to be consistent with the cell **202** that the entity is in. The projection of the latitude-longitude based cell boundaries on the local tangent plane **204** of the cell **202** generally results in non-linear curves in the local tangent plane **204**. This complicates the modeling of terrain surfaces in the local rectangular system. It is conventional to use three-dimensional triangular plates defined in GCS coordinates to fit the terrain surface. Unless care is taken gaps or overlaps in the terrain representation may ensue.

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FIG. **3A** illustrates a three-dimensional curvilinear orthogonal coordinate system of the present invention, referred to hereafter as a local surface coordinate (LSC) system. The LSC system uses a reference model of a three-dimensional curved surface (e.g., the spheroid **100**). The curved surface has non-zero curvature. In one embodiment, the reference model is the WGS84 ellipsoid.

A surface grid **240** of cells **242** (also referred to as a set of cells) covers the three-dimensional curved surface. FIG. **3A** shows only a portion of the curved surface and only a portion of the cells are shown with reference numerals. Each cell **242** is a subset of the three-dimensional curved surface and itself has a curved surface. A unique identifier is associated with each cell **242**. The cells **242** are non-overlapping and closed. That is, points on the surface within the interior of a cell **242** are in one cell only, and points on the surface on a cell boundary are in each cell that is on that boundary. For example, a point that is on a corner boundary is in four cells.

In general, the size of the cell **242** is adapted to permit accurate geometric approximations (e.g., small angle approximations) described in more detail below. In simulation applications that model line of sight (LOS) between entities on the ground, the distance between the observer and the observed is nominally 5 kilometers. For entities other than those on the ground, the distance generally does not exceed 100 kilometers. Accordingly, a cell size of 1 degree latitude by 1 degree longitude is sufficient to accommodate typical distances between entities. For this cell size, the greatest latitude or longitude between two entities in a cell **242** is 1 degree. Also, these dimensions are the same cell dimensions as those of the GCS, thus legacy simulation and embedded applications that use GCS can be readily adapted to use LSC.

Some other embodiments have smaller cell size dimensions and other embodiments have larger cell size dimensions than 1 degree latitude by 1 degree longitude. A practical upper limit to the size of a cell **242** is an octant of the spheroid surface. Beyond that size, the local surface coordinate system of the cell (described below) no longer uniquely defines each point in that cell.

A three-dimensional curvilinear orthogonal coordinate system (also called a local surface coordinate system) **244** is defined for each cell **242**. Each cell **242** has a unique point on the curved surface called an origin o. The origin o can be any one of the points on the curved surface of that cell **242**. In one embodiment, the origin o of the local surface coordinate system **244** for each cell **242** is at a point in the interior of the cell **242** called a center **248**. In geodetic coordinates, an origin at the center **248** is expressed as: $((\phi_{i+1}-\phi_i)/2, (\lambda_{j+1}-\lambda_j)/2, 0)$. For or those embodiments in which the origin o is not at the cell center, a translation of coordinates is employed.

FIG. **3B** shows in more detail the local surface coordinate system **244** for a representative example of the cells **242**. The local surface coordinate system **244** for each cell **242** includes a first coordinate curve, called a first curvilinear axis ($P_{i,j}$ axis), that extends on the curved surface of the cell, a second coordinate curve, called a second curvilinear axis ($Q_{i,j}$ axis), that extends on the curved surface of the cell orthogonal to the first curvilinear axis, and a rectilinear axis ($H_{i,j}$ axis) that is normal to the surface of the cell **242** at the origin o. In one embodiment, the origin is at $((\phi_{i+1}-\phi_i)/2, (\lambda_{j+1}-\lambda_j)/2, 0)$, the $P_{i,j}$ axis extends along a parallel of latitude (e.g., easterly), the $Q_{i,j}$ axis extends along a parallel of longitude (or meridian) pointing north, and the $H_{i,j}$ axis is orthogonal to the surface. Points on, above, or below the surface of the cell **242** have local surface coordinates $(p_{i,j}, q_{i,j}, h_{i,j})$. It is convenient to let $\Delta_i = (\phi_{i+1}-\phi_i)/2$ and $\Delta_j = (\lambda_{j+1}-\lambda_j)/2$ so that the origin of a cell **242** is denoted as $(\Delta_i, \Delta_j, 0)$.

The $P_{i,j}$ and $Q_{i,j}$ curvilinear axes conform to the curve of the cell surface; that is, unlike the local tangent plane **204** of the GCS (FIG. 2), the $P_{i,j}$ and $Q_{i,j}$ curvilinear axes are on the curved surface of the cell **242** from the cell center **244** to the cell boundaries and beyond if desired. Accordingly, each point that is at a geodetic height of zero ($h_{i,j}=0$) is on the surface of the cell **242**. Also, each cell **242** abuts its neighboring cells without forming any gaps or slivers. Consequently, the LSC can maintain continuity of dynamics and geometric space curves across cell boundaries.

Generally, the LSC system defines points ($p_{i,j}, q_{i,j}, h_{i,j}$) that are used to describe a position of an entity in a three-dimensional coordinate system with respect to the reference model. The definition of local surface coordinates in terms of geodetic coordinates with respect to the reference model depends upon the shape of the spheroid **100**. For a spherical reference model, the local surface coordinates $p_{i,j}, q_{i,j}$, and $h_{i,j}$ corresponding to a given point ϕ, λ, h are defined for the cell i, j by:

$$P_{i,j} = (r+h_{i,j})\cos(\phi-\Delta_i)(\lambda-\Delta_j) \text{ and} \quad (\text{Eq. 2})$$

$$q_{i,j} = (r+h_{i,j})(\phi-\Delta_i), \quad (\text{Eq. 3})$$

where $h_{i,j}$ is the perpendicular distance from the surface to the given point and r is the fixed radius of the sphere. Defining $\xi_i = \phi - \Delta_i$ and $\eta_j = \lambda - \Delta_j$. Equations 2 and 3 can also be written as

$$p_{i,j} = (r+h_{i,j})\cos(\xi_i)\eta_j \text{ and} \quad (\text{Eq. 3.1})$$

$$q_{i,j} = (r+h_{i,j})\xi_i \quad (\text{Eq. 3.2})$$

Each LSC system has $P_{i,j}, Q_{i,j}$, and $H_{i,j}$, and $H_{i,j}$ axes that extend to infinity but are generally used for points lying in, on or near a cell. The local values of $p_{i,j}$ and $q_{i,j}$ can be viewed as arc length distances from the local origin. The variable $q_{i,j}$ is the arc length of a circular segment of the meridian from the origin to ϕ . The variable $p_{i,j}$ is the arc length of a segment of a circle on the sphere defined by the intersection of the parallel of longitude through λ and the sphere.

For a spherical ERM, the velocity components in the LSC system for the cell i, j are given by

$$V^{r,i,j} = h'_{i,j} \quad (\text{Eq. 3.3})$$

$$V_{\phi,i,j} = (r+h_{i,j})\xi'_i \quad (\text{Eq. 3.4})$$

$$V_{\lambda,i,j} = (r+h_{i,j})\cos(\xi_i)\eta'_j \quad (\text{Eq. 3.5})$$

In these equations the prime (') means a derivative with respect to time. The magnitude of the velocity is then given by:

$$V_{i,j} = \sqrt{V_{r,i,j}^2 + V_{\phi,i,j}^2 + V_{\lambda,i,j}^2} \quad (\text{Eq. 3.6})$$

Simplified kinematics equations of motion are used in simulations for motion planning. For movement restricted to the surface of the sphere, where $V_{i,j}=0$ and $h_{i,j}=0$, simplified constant velocity kinematics equations of motion are given by:

$$V_{\phi,i,j} = r\xi'_i = A_1, \quad (\text{Eq. 3.7})$$

$$V_{\lambda,i,j} = r\cos(\Delta_i)\eta'_j = A_2 \quad (\text{Eq. 3.8})$$

$$V_{i,j} = \sqrt{\left(\frac{A_1}{r}\right)^2 + \left(\frac{A_2}{r}\cos(\Delta_i)\right)^2} = A_3, \quad (\text{Eq. 3.9})$$

where A_3 is a constant given by,

$$A_3 = \sqrt{\left(\frac{A_1}{r}\right)^2 + \left(\frac{A_2}{r}\cos(\Delta_i)\right)^2}. \quad (\text{Eq. 3.10})$$

These kinematic relations are linear in time and are therefore computationally simple (easy to compute). The distance $d_{i,j}$ traveled on the surface of a cell by an entity, assuming constant velocity components, is then given by

$$d_{i,j} = A_3 t \quad (\text{Eq. 3.11})$$

The distance $d_{i,j}$ is generally not the same as the minimum distance path, which is the arc of a great circle. For small enough cell sizes the difference between the two distance measures is small enough so that movement planning on the surface of the ERM can be supported. For typical planning ranges for ground vehicle entities (less than ten kilometers), the two distance measures are almost indistinguishable. Note that the analogous kinematic path for a CLTP system, such as GCS, generated under the assumption that velocity components are constant, does not lie on the surface of the sphere.

Simple kinematics models can be developed for the spherical case in three dimensions by an approach similar to that described above.

Kinetics formulations can be developed for a CLTP (rectangular coordinate system) with the origin on the surface of an oblate spheroid ERM as described in "Lagrangian Dynamics", D. A. Wells, Schaum's Outline Series, 1967, page 293, Example 14.5. These formulations can then be developed for the case of a spherical or oblate spheroid ERM so that the number of terms involving transcendental functions is minimized. Such kinetic formulations can then be written in terms of a LSC system.

For an oblate spheroid **100**, there are two radii of curvature that depend upon latitude, the radius of curvature in the meridian R_M (curvature of a meridian ellipse) and the radius of curvature in the prime vertical R_N . The radii are given by:

$$R_M(\phi) = \frac{a(1-\epsilon^2)}{(1-\epsilon^2\sin^2(\phi))^{3/2}}; \text{ and} \quad (\text{Eq. 4})$$

$$R_N(\phi) = \frac{a}{(1-\epsilon^2\sin^2(\phi))^{1/2}} \quad (\text{Eq. 5})$$

where a is the semi-major axis of the spheroid **100** and ϵ is the eccentricity.

For the i, j cell with an origin at $(\Delta_i, \Delta_j, 0)$, the local surface coordinates for $p_{i,j}$ and $q_{i,j}$ can be written:

$$p_{i,j} = R_N(\xi_i)(\eta_j), \text{ and} \quad (\text{Eq. 6})$$

$$q_{i,j} = S(\xi_i), \quad (\text{Eq. 7})$$

where $q_{i,j}$ is the arc length of the segment of the meridian ellipse from the local origin to ϕ . The variable $p_{i,j}$ is the arc length of a segment of a circle in the plane of the parallel of longitude of λ .

From the calculus, the arc length S from one point ϕ_1 on an ellipse to another point ϕ_2 on an ellipse with semi-major axis a is given by:

$$S = \int_{\phi_1}^{\phi_2} R_M(\tau) d\tau = \int_{\phi_1}^{\phi_2} \frac{a(1-\tau^2)}{(1-\epsilon^2\sin^2(\tau))^{3/2}} d\tau, \quad (\text{Eq. 8})$$

where τ is the variable of integration.

For small angle differences $\delta=(\phi_2-\phi_1)$, S can be approximated as

$$S(\phi_2-\phi_1)\approx A_0a(1-\epsilon^2)(\phi_2-\phi_1), \quad (\text{Eq. 9})$$

$$\text{where } A_0=1+3\epsilon^2/4+45\epsilon^4/64 \quad (\text{Eq. 10})$$

This approximation to $s(\phi_2-\phi_1)$ has millimeter accuracy for $\phi_i\leq\phi_2-\phi_1\leq\phi_{i+1}$ (i.e., within a cell). In this case, with $\xi_i=\phi_2-\phi_1$.

$$S(\xi_i)\approx A_0a(1-\epsilon^2)(\xi_i). \quad (\text{Eq. 10.1})$$

As a result of the approximation (10.1) and (7), the local surface coordinates can be approximated by:

$$p_{i,j}=R_N(\xi_i)\eta_j \text{ and} \quad (\text{Eq. 11})$$

$$q_{i,j}=A_0a(1-\epsilon^2)\xi_i. \quad (\text{Eq. 12})$$

Since the difference between ϕ and ϕ_i is less than 0.5 degrees (or less for smaller cells), $\cos(\phi-\phi_i)\approx 1$. In addition, for small cell sizes, $R_N(\phi)\approx R_N(\phi_i)$.

The equations for the local surface coordinates $p_{i,j}$ and $q_{i,j}$ then can be approximated by:

$$p_{i,j}=K_{1i}\eta_j \text{ and;} \quad (\text{Eq. 13})$$

$$q_{i,j}=K_{2i}\xi_i. \quad (\text{Eq. 14})$$

where $K_{1i}=R_N(\Delta_i)$ and $K_{2i}=A_0a(1-\epsilon^2)$ are assumed to be constants near the i,j th cell. Using Eq. 13 and Eq. 14, simplified kinematic equations of motion are readily derived for an oblate spheroid ERM.

Local Surface Coordinate System Applications

As described above, computational complexity can limit the usefulness of a coordinate system in modeling, simulation, and embedded applications, and transcendental functions, (e.g., trigonometric expressions), generally increase the computational complexity. In general, the LSC system of the present invention avoids transcendental functions in the simulation of movement, terrain skin modeling, line of sight (LOS) determinations, and kinetics.

In simulating movement of an entity from an initial point to a final point in a simulation, there are two distinct phases, planning and simulation. The planning of a path is generally done under assumptions about the nature of the natural environment through which the entity travels. In the planning phase, relatively gross assumptions can be made about the state of the intervening environment between the initial and final points. Such considerations as winds, traffic ability, clouds, obstructions and similar factors can be estimated via a type of average influence. As a result, planned paths are not very accurate and precise models cannot be justified.

In the case of surface ships, the paths used for planning are typically great circle arcs connecting the initial and final points. Some assumptions are that the Earth is modeled as a sphere and that the surface of the water and the surface of the sphere are coincident. In addition, the ship is assumed to move at a constant speed along the arc of the great circle. The average speed may be decreased to account for intervening tides, winds or other environmental conditions. For aircraft, the planned paths are also typically great circle arcs. Again, the planning speed can be adjusted to account for perceived intervening environmental conditions. For land vehicles, when the coordinate system is a local tangent plane system, such as is used in GCS, the planned path is assumed to be in the X-Y plane. Once again, the planning speed can be adjusted for perceived local conditions. Aside from the inability to plan precisely in the face of an unknown environment, path planning is typically performed using two-dimensional

maps. Generally, for motion planning models, planning occurs in two dimensions and not in three dimensions.

Because movement planning is done in two dimensions, movement models are typically formulated as kinematic models. That is, the designer specifies the form of the time dependency of the movement model and that form does not involve forces acting on the entity. Generally, the designer selects movement models that are linear in time with respect to the coordinate variables. When the coordinate system is rectangular, motion is linear with respect to the coordinate variables. When the coordinate system is curvilinear, the movement model may be linear in time, but spatial movement may be along a space curve in three-dimensional space. In the case of the local surface coordinates of the invention, the assumption of linearity in time leads to computational simplicity, while the movement paths conform more naturally to the underlying shape of the Earth.

The simulation of movement must account for environmental effects to the extent that such effects are modeled. Generally, such movement models are based on kinetics formulations and are three-dimensional. That is, forces such as drag, friction, and others that act on the entity are modeled using Newtonian laws ($F=Ma$). In some cases, particularly when the entities are ground vehicles, kinematics formulations are employed in the simulation of movement. However, these kinematics formulations are employed in three dimensions. When kinetics models are based on rectangular coordinates, particularly local tangent plane systems, certain fundamental forces such as those due to the acceleration of gravity have components on all three axes. These components always involve direction cosines of latitude and longitude (that is, the components require trigonometric values of latitude and longitude). Such formulations are computationally complex and relatively slow to compute.

When the equivalent kinetics equations are derived in terms of the local surface coordinates of the invention, the acceleration of gravity acts along the vertical axis of each localized local surface coordinate system. In addition, the kinetics equations can be formulated so that the velocity and acceleration terms of the equations of motion contain no trigonometric functions. Because of these observations, the local surface coordinate formulations are relatively simpler in a computational sense than formulations in rectangular coordinates. To achieve equivalent computational simplicity when using rectangular coordinates requires the use of approximations wherein "small" terms are set to zero. Such an approach inevitably leads to unacceptable inconsistencies in results.

FIG. 4 illustrates the use of local surface coordinates in the modeling and computation of movement (of an entity). Consider, for example, an entity moving from point P1 and point P2 on the surface of the spheroid 100 (i.e., $h=0$) along a meridian. The path 270 taken by the entity is a circular arc (in the case where the spheroid 100 is a sphere). Some prior art coordinate systems, e.g., GCS, model the ground movement as a straight line 274 between the points P₁ and P₂. This movement is unnatural because the line 274 passes through the spheroid surface (i.e., goes underground). As another example, consider a path 286 taken by an entity (e.g., an aircraft) at a constant altitude h between points P₃ and P₄. Again, some prior art coordinate systems model this movement as a straight line 290 between the points P₃ and P₄, which is unnatural. A modified version of GCS models the movement along the circular paths 270 and 286 by breaking the curves into many short straight line segments. However, the process is computationally intensive and piecewise is unnatural.

In contrast, the LSC system of the invention models the movement along the circular arcs **270** and **286**, which are more natural than the paths **274** and **290**, respectively, and computes the constant velocity path using linear functions. Consider that the line segments **278**, **282** to point P_1 , and point P_2 , respectively, have lengths “a”, then the length of path **270** from point P_1 to point P_2 is given by

$$s=a(\phi-\phi_0) \quad (\text{Eq. 15})$$

Various principles of the LSC system for a spherical reference model are evident. For one, constant velocity paths along any one axis ($P_{i,j}$, $Q_{i,j}$ or $H_{i,j}$), when the other two variables remain constant, are linear in time. For example, constant velocity “parallel” to the $Q_{i,j}$ axis is linear in time when $h_{i,j}$ and $p_{i,j}$ are constants. Also, constant velocity paths in localized surface coordinates are linear in time and linear functions of spatial coordinates $p_{i,j}$, $q_{i,j}$, and $h_{i,j}$. That is, viewing $p_{i,j}$, $q_{i,j}$, $h_{i,j}$ space as a rectangular system, satisfy the parametric equations of a line.

FIG. **5** illustrates the use of local surface coordinates for terrain skin modeling along a meridian of the spheroid (here, a sphere). In brief overview, the reference model of the spheroid **100** provides a smooth surface, but the real world has terrain. Typically, terrain data, for example, latitude, longitude and height, are collected from the four corners of a cell (here, a cell is determined by longitude and latitude demarcations) and archived in a real-world coordinate framework with respect to a standard ERM (e.g., the WGS84 ellipsoid). For use in a particular coordinate system (e.g., GCS), the terrain data is converted from the real-world coordinate framework into the coordinate framework of the particular coordinate system. The terrain skin is then modeled from the terrain data.

In FIG. **5**, points P_1, P_2, P_3 and P_4 are terrain height data. Points P_1 and P_2 are on the three-dimensional curved surface of the spheroid **100**, point P_3 is at height h_{13} and point P_4 is at height h_{24} . The curve **304** on the surface between points P_1 and P_2 appears natural for terrain skin with $h=0$, whereas the straight line **308** between points P_1 and P_2 is unnatural (i.e., the line passes through the terrain). Similarly, the curve **312** between points P_3 and P_4 appears more natural for a terrain model than the straight line **316**.

As with computing constant velocity paths, prior art implementations model the terrain skin by using the straight lines **308** and **316** or by breaking the curve **304** and **312** into many short straight line segments. In contrast, terrain skin modeling in the LSC system of the invention is linear and of a more natural form (i.e., the terrain skin curves with the curvature of the three-dimensional curved space). In essence, cellular-based local surface coordinates reduce computational complexity, while retaining the natural geometric properties of the Earth curvature when approximating terrain skin models. FIG. **6** illustrates the linear relationship between height h and q in the LSC system. For example, the equation for modeling the terrain skin from point P_1 to point P_2 is $h=0$ (represented by line **330**) and for modeling the terrain skin between point P_3 to point P_4 is $h=h_{13}$ (a constant, provided points P_3 and P_4 are at the same height ($h_{13}=h_{24}$)). If points P_3 and P_4 are at different heights, the terrain skin model is obtained from the equation of the line **334** between points P_3 and P_4 .

FIG. **7** illustrates the use of local surface coordinates for computing a line of sight (LOS) between an observer (O) and a first target (T_1) and between the observer O and a second target T_2 . In real-world coordinates, LOS lines are modeled as straight lines between the observer O and the targets T_1 and T_2 . In local surface coordinates, the straight LOS lines between the observer O and the targets T_1 and T_2 are curved.

Computing LOS is simpler using straight lines than using curves. Thus, in the LSC system of the invention, a process for determining LOS between the observer O and the targets T_1 and T_2 uses straight lines to determine initially if the terrain blocks the respective LOS. If the terrain blocks the straight line, the curve is blocked, and there is no clear line of sight. If the terrain does not block the straight line, then the LOS process uses a height correction to the terrain, described below, to determine if the terrain blocks the curve. In this way, computing LOS in the LSC system involves evaluating linear equations instead of the curves.

In FIG. **7**, the terrain is shown in bold. A first line **374** and a first curve **378** pass between the observer O and the target T_1 . The first curve **378** is below, i.e., is lower in height than, the first line **374**. The LOS process of the invention determines whether the terrain blocks the line **374**. If so, then the terrain also blocks the curve **378**. In this example, the terrain segment **370** between locations **3** and **4** blocks the first line **374**, and thus the LOS between the observer O and the target T_1 . Because the terrain **370** blocks the line **374**, the LOS process concludes that the terrain also blocks curve **378**.

Also in FIG. **7**, a second line **382** and a second curve **386** pass between the observer O and the target T_2 . The second curve **386** is below the second line **382**. In this example, the line **382** does not pass through any part of the terrain between the observer O and the target T_2 , but the second curve **386** does.

The LOS process of the invention computes first the line of sight according to the line **382** and determines initially that there may be a clear line of sight between the observer O and the target T_2 . The LOS results at this point, however, are inconclusive because the curve **386** can still pass through the terrain although the line **382** does not. This situation is illustrated in FIG. **7**. Before concluding that the curve **386** does not pass through the terrain, the LOS process performs a height correction (described below) and computes again whether the line **382** to the target T_2 now passes through the terrain. In one embodiment, the height correction is used to lower or raise the target T_2 . In another embodiment, the height correction is used to adjust the terrain. If after the height correction, the line **382** does not pass through the terrain, then the LOS process deems the observer O to have a clear line of sight to the target T_2 . If the line **382** is now blocked, the observer O does not have a clear line of sight.

FIG. **8** illustrates an embodiment of a technique for determining a height correction to be used in LOS computations. The technique, referred to as Saggatis or Arrow, corrects for the curvature of the Earth. The LOS process described above uses this technique to produce a height-correction value that is used to adjust to the height of the target or terrain. The following equation yields the height correction value (Δh):

$$\Delta h = \frac{d}{\cos(\phi)} - (a + h) \approx \frac{d^2}{2a}. \quad (\text{Eq. 16})$$

The accuracy of the approximation improves as ϕ goes to 0. For distances of less than approximately 30 kilometers between the observer and target, an approximation of d^2 as $h^2 + q^2$ obviates the need to evaluate the computationally complex nonlinear function required for the exact computation of d^2 .

While the invention has been shown and described with reference to specific preferred embodiments, it should be understood by those skilled in the art that various changes in

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form and detail may be made therein without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention as defined by the following claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A method for making a line of sight determination, the method comprising:

identifying, using a processor, a first location on a reference model of a spheroid, wherein the reference model of the spheroid comprises a plurality of cells, and wherein each cell of the plurality of cells is defined by a three-dimensional coordinate system comprising a first curvilinear axis that extends along a curved surface of the cell, a second curvilinear axis that extends along the curved surface of the cell and is orthogonal to the first curvilinear axis at an origin, and a third axis perpendicular to the curved surface of the cell and extending from the origin, wherein the third axis is orthogonal to the first curvilinear axis and the second curvilinear axis at the origin;

wherein the first location is located within a first cell of the plurality of cells;

identifying a target location on the reference model of the spheroid; and

determining whether there is a line of sight between the first location and the target location using one or more of a first curvilinear axis of the first cell, a second curvilinear axis of the first cell, and a third axis of the first cell.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein determining whether there is the line of sight further comprises:

identifying terrain within the first cell; and

determining whether the identified terrain blocks the line of sight along a straight line between the first location and the target location.

3. The method of claim 2, further comprising determining a height correction value for adjusting a height of the target location or the identified terrain if it is determined that the identified terrain does not block the line of sight along the straight line between the first location and the target location.

4. The method of claim 3, further comprising determining that there is the line of sight between the first location and the target if the identified terrain does not obstruct the target location after the height of the target or the identified terrain is adjusted using the height correction value.

5. The method of claim 3, wherein the height correction value is based at least in part on one or more of the first curvilinear axis of the first cell, the second curvilinear axis of the first cell, and the third axis of the first cell.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein the target location is located within the first cell of the plurality of cells.

7. The method of claim 1, wherein the target location is located within a second cell of the plurality of cells.

8. A system for making a line of sight determination, the system comprising:

a processor; and

a memory having computer-readable instructions stored thereon that, upon execution by the processor, cause a computing device to:

identify a first location on a reference model of a spheroid, wherein the reference model of the spheroid comprises a plurality of cells, and wherein each cell of the plurality of cells is defined by a three-dimensional coordinate system comprising a first curvilinear axis that extends along a curved surface of the cell and a second curvilinear

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axis that extends along the curved surface of the cell and is orthogonal to the first curvilinear axis at an origin; wherein the first location is located within a first cell of the plurality of cells;

identify a target location on the reference model of the spheroid; and

determine whether there is a line of sight between the first location and the target location using one or more of a first curvilinear axis of the first cell and a second curvilinear axis of the first cell.

9. The system of claim 8, wherein the computing device is further caused to:

identify terrain within the first cell; and

determine whether the identified terrain blocks the line of sight along a straight line between the first location and the target location.

10. The system of claim 9, wherein the computing device is further caused to determine a height correction value for adjusting a height of the target or the identified terrain if it is determined that the identified terrain does not block the line of sight along the straight line between the first location and the target location.

11. The system of claim 10, wherein the computing device is further caused to determine that there is the line of sight between the first location and the target location if the identified terrain does not obstruct the target location after the height of the target location or the identified terrain is adjusted using the height correction value.

12. The system of claim 10, wherein the height correction value is based at least in part on one or more of the first curvilinear axis of the first cell and the second curvilinear axis of the first cell.

13. The system of claim 8, wherein the target location is located within the first cell of the plurality of cells.

14. The system of claim 8, wherein the target location is located within a second cell of the plurality of cells.

15. A non-transitory computer-readable medium having computer-readable instructions stored thereon that, responsive to execution, cause a computing device to:

identify a first location on a reference model of a spheroid, wherein the reference model of the spheroid comprises a plurality of cells, and wherein each cell of the plurality of cells is defined by a three-dimensional coordinate system comprising a first curvilinear axis that extends along a curved surface of the cell, a second curvilinear axis that extends along the curved surface of the cell and is orthogonal to the first curvilinear axis, and a third axis perpendicular to the curved surface of the cell, wherein the third axis is orthogonal to the first curvilinear axis and the second curvilinear axis;

wherein the first location is located within a first cell of the plurality of cells;

identify a target location on the reference model of the spheroid; and

determine whether there is a line of sight between the first location and the target location using one or more of a first curvilinear axis of the first cell, a second curvilinear axis of the first cell, and a third axis of the first cell.

16. The computer-readable medium of claim 15, wherein the computing device is further caused to store the determination of whether there is the line of sight in a memory.

17. The computer-readable medium of claim 15, wherein the computing device is further caused to identify terrain

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within the first cell and determine whether identified terrain blocks the line of sight along a straight line between the first location and the target location.

18. The computer-readable medium of claim **17**, wherein the computing device is further caused to determine a height correction value for adjusting a height of the target location or the identified terrain if it is determined that the identified terrain does not block the line of sight along the straight line between the first location and the target location.

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19. The computer-readable medium of claim **18**, wherein the height correction value is based at least in part on a distance between the first location and the target location.

20. The computer-readable medium of claim **18**, wherein the height correction value is based at least in part on one or more of the first curvilinear axis of the first cell, the second curvilinear axis of the first cell, and the third axis of the first cell.

* * * * *

UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE
CERTIFICATE OF CORRECTION

PATENT NO. : 7,983,881 B2
APPLICATION NO. : 12/193504
DATED : July 19, 2011
INVENTOR(S) : Toms

Page 1 of 1

It is certified that error appears in the above-identified patent and that said Letters Patent is hereby corrected as shown below:

Column 14, line 19, in Claim 10, delete "The system of claim of claim 9," and insert -- The system of claim 9, --.

Signed and Sealed this
Third Day of January, 2012

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David J. Kappos". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

David J. Kappos
Director of the United States Patent and Trademark Office